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## Comparative Analysis of Foreign Language Education Trends: Insights from the Kurdish and Mekong Delta Regions

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### Abstract

*This study presents an in-depth comparative analysis of foreign language education in two distinct regions: the Kurdish and Mekong Delta areas. Harnessing data from reputable databases, including ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus, this literature review aimed to shed light on the multifaceted aspects influencing language education in these regions. The study's purpose was to identify prevailing trends, the infusion of technology in pedagogy, and the resulting outcomes from such educational strategies. In terms of scope, the study cast a wide net, encompassing pedagogical methodologies, challenges faced, perceptions held by students, and the ramifications of educational policies in place. Furthermore, it delved into the realm of teacher training and preparation, pinpointing key differences and similarities in the two regions. From the amassed data, salient findings emerged. Both regions displayed an inclination towards student-centric teaching paradigms. However, the Mekong Delta was identified as being at the forefront of embracing technological advancements and leaning more heavily on standardized testing protocols. In contrast, the Kurdish region intertwined traditional teaching methodologies with newer, innovative strategies. On the challenge front, the Kurdish region grappled with the ramifications of political unrest, while the Mekong Delta battled issues stemming from infrastructural deficits. A striking commonality was unearthed regarding student perceptions. Irrespective of regional differences, students in both locales perceived foreign language acquisition as a pivotal tool — a means to unlock enhanced employment opportunities and foster a deeper cultural comprehension. As the study drew to a close, it carved out actionable insights for a spectrum of audiences, from teachers and policymakers to vested stakeholders. The crux of the findings advocated for the crafting of language education strategies that are finely tuned to regional nuances and challenges. However, the study was not without its limitations. Predominantly, these revolved around the potential for literature biases and the limitations inherent in the chosen scope. These very constraints, though, present fertile ground for future research, beckoning for more granular studies and diversification in research methods to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand.*

**Keywords:** *the Kurdish region, the Mekong Delta region, foreign language education, a literature analysis*

### Introduction

The world we inhabit is a diverse mosaic of cultures, languages, and geographies. Every region, irrespective of its location and demography, carries its unique educational practices, intricately

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shaped by its history, society, and environment (van Lier, 2004). Such is the case with the Kurdish region and the Mekong Delta region. At first glance, the mountainous expanses of the Kurdish territories in West Asia and the riverine plains of the Mekong Delta in Southeast Asia might seem worlds apart. Yet, the dynamics of foreign language education in these regions present an intriguing interplay of similarities and differences.

Foreign language education, central to our study, plays a pivotal role in forging connections in our globalized society. To further elaborate, our main aim in this study is not only to identify the distinctive and shared educational methodologies of these two regions but also to understand the underlying socio-cultural and historical contexts that drive these practices. It acts as a bridge, enabling communication and fostering understanding among diverse cultures and communities (Byram, 2008). The need to emphasize and re-examine the modalities of foreign language education becomes especially pertinent in regions like the Kurdish territories and the Mekong Delta. Historically rooted in their local linguistic landscapes, these regions now grapple with integrating global languages, facing a myriad of challenges and embracing emerging opportunities (Wright, 2020; Sofi-Karim, 2015).

In light of these complexities, this literature analysis embarked on an in-depth exploration of the foreign language education practices in these two geographically and culturally distinct regions. By juxtaposing their experiences, we aimed to draw both parallels and distinctions in their pedagogical trajectories. The central inquiry of our study revolved around understanding how the Kurdish region and the Mekong Delta navigate the intricate terrains of foreign language education, and the resultant implications and lessons for the broader global educational community.

As the subsequent sections unfold, they shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of foreign language education, underpinned by historical nuances and socio-cultural dynamics in both the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions. Our aspiration remains to offer insights that can inform and enrich foreign language education approaches globally, promoting inclusivity and adaptability in the face of ever-evolving challenges and opportunities.

## **Literature Review**

Segueing into the literature, we embark on a deep dive into many facets that potentially have influenced foreign language education in both regions.

## **Historical Context of Foreign Language Education**

### **Kurdish Region**

Historically, the Kurdish region has experienced a tumultuous socio-political landscape. Several studies, such as Khalil (2016) and Sulaiman et al. (2022), have outlined the effects of regional conflicts on education. Transitioning from its historical challenges, the native Kurdish language, despite facing periods of suppression, witnessed the gradual incorporation of foreign languages. The global milieu and imperative international communication channels primarily influenced this shift towards languages, especially English.

### **Mekong Delta**

Drawing a parallel to another distinct region, the Mekong Delta offers a contrasting narrative in the realm of foreign language education. This riverine landscape, enriched by its own set of historical events, tells a story quite different from the Kurdish region. The Mekong Delta, with

its history intertwined with French colonization, experienced a distinct trajectory. As outlined by Wright (2020), French was once the language of administration and education, but post-independence, English and other ASEAN languages gained prominence, reflecting geopolitical and trade alliances. Building upon its colonial legacy, this transition mirrors the delta's evolving priorities and its responsiveness to global and regional linguistic trends.

## **Methodologies Employed in Foreign Language Teaching**

### **Kurdish Region**

Transitioning from historical contexts to contemporary pedagogical practices, the Kurdish region reveals an evolving mix of traditional and modern teaching methodologies. Many teachers in the Kurdish region have adopted a communicative approach to language teaching, emphasizing interactive techniques (Omar Bali et al., 2018). However, Obaid Al-Khafaji et al. (2021) pointed out that traditional methods still hold sway in many institutions, relying heavily on rote learning.

### **Mekong Delta**

In contrast, when turning our gaze to the Mekong Delta, we observe nuances influenced by the region's socio-economic challenges and infrastructural realities. In the Mekong Delta, there has been a steady shift towards task-based and learner-centered approaches (Thao & Mai, 2020). However, infrastructure and resource limitations in some areas have been identified as impediments to fully realizing these modern methodologies (Thanh, 2010).

## **Societal Attitudes and Motivations**

### **Kurdish Region**

In the Kurdish region, the community's perspective on foreign language education reveals a duality of purpose. On one hand, there's an aspirational motive, with parents and teachers viewing foreign language proficiency as a stepping stone for upward mobility, as underscored by Kenny (2022). On the other hand, amidst this globalizing impetus, there is a palpable desire to retain and celebrate Kurdish linguistic and cultural heritage, a sentiment eloquently captured by Karim and Mohammed (2018).

### **Mekong Delta**

Transitioning to the Mekong Delta, the societal attitudes mirror its unique socio-economic fabric and developmental aspirations. For many in the Mekong Delta, proficiency in foreign languages, predominantly English, is not merely an academic pursuit but a tangible asset that opens doors to better job opportunities and wider global networks, as highlighted by Tran and Tanemura (2020). However, navigating through the urban-rural divide, Taylor (2004) draws our attention to a pertinent trend: urban centers exhibit a more pronounced enthusiasm for foreign languages, in contrast to the relatively subdued interest in rural areas. This divergence underscores the region's broader challenges of resource allocation and educational equity.

## **Outcomes and Challenges**

### **Kurdish Region**

In the Kurdish heartlands, outcomes in foreign language education paint a tale of two

extremities. Urban hubs like Erbil, with their relatively modernized infrastructure and resources, have exhibited encouraging strides in foreign language education, as identified by Celik (2019). However, drawing a contrast, remote regions present a different scenario. The challenges there, such as limited educational resources and a dearth of well-trained teachers, have been well-documented by Shraim and Khlaif (2010). Additionally, the shadow of political instability has occasionally cast disruptions in the continuity and quality of education, further complicating the situation.

### **Mekong Delta**

As the lens shifts to the Mekong Delta, we encounter a mix of enthusiasm and impediments in their journey toward foreign language proficiency. The region's journey in foreign language education is marked by a vibrant zeal to master these languages. Yet, the reality of proficiency levels is nuanced. Challenges, including inconsistent teacher training, overcrowded classrooms, and restricted technological access, have been underlined by Nghia (2018). However, amidst these hurdles, there is a silver lining. With the government's strategic interventions, a transformative change has been set in motion over the past decade, leading to commendable advancements in foreign language education. This shift has been insightfully captured by Tran and Marginson (2018).

### **Implications for Global Educational Community**

Delving deeper into the educational tapestries of both regions brings forth pertinent implications for the broader global educational community. Both the Kurdish region and the Mekong Delta, despite their geographical and cultural distinctions, serve as microcosms of larger global phenomena in foreign language education. Their experiences underline the profound significance of understanding and adapting to local realities. Sutoris (2018) and Conole (2012) have been proponents of this viewpoint, advocating for tailored, context-driven methodologies. Their works highlight that a one-size-fits-all approach, especially in diverse landscapes, often falls short of addressing the unique challenges and leveraging the inherent opportunities.

Reflecting on these findings, it becomes imperative for the global educational community to eschew rigid, universalistic paradigms. Instead, there is a pressing need to adopt a more flexible and adaptive stance, taking into account the myriad socio-cultural intricacies that shape educational practices and outcomes.

In encapsulating the narratives of these two regions, it is clear that any endeavor to enhance foreign language education on a global scale must be informed by both shared and unique regional experiences. The literature reviewed here is but a stepping stone, prompting further nuanced explorations and fostering a broader understanding of the multifaceted world of foreign language education.

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

Given our objective to discern similarities and differences between the two regions, an exhaustive literature analysis was employed. This approach ensured a systematic exploration of existing journal articles to determine patterns, commonalities, and discrepancies in foreign

language education across both regions (Mallett et al., 2012).

### **Data Collection**

The integrity and success of a literature analysis largely hinge on the meticulous selection and organization of sources. In our study, this significance has led us to a detailed, multi-step process for curating our dataset from the vast sea of available literature.

We anchored our data collection process in four renowned academic databases: ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus. ERIC, with its focus on education, offered a rich repertoire of literature that was invaluable to our research. JSTOR, with its blend of contemporary and archival content, ensured both depth and relevance. Google Scholar's wide-ranging coverage was unmatched, while Scopus's extensive abstracts and citation information helped in assessing the impact and relevance of various studies.

The selection of articles from these databases adhered to stringent criteria to maintain the study's focus and rigor. Firstly, we were exclusively considering articles published in the last two decades to ensure the discussions, findings, and methodologies resonate with contemporary dynamics in foreign language education. Secondly, given the geographical focus of our study, we were concentrating on articles that delved into foreign language education in either the Kurdish region or the Mekong Delta. Lastly, the depth and quality of the research were paramount. Articles backed by robust empirical data or those providing a comprehensive review of practices, methodologies, and outcomes in the domain of foreign language education in the target regions had been prioritized.

Post-selection, the organization of these articles was crucial for efficient analysis. We had categorized them based on distinct themes such as pedagogical strategies, challenges, historical influences, and outcomes. Alongside this categorization, each article was accompanied by a concise annotation, offering a snapshot of its key findings, methodologies, and contributions. To facilitate seamless access, referencing, and citation, we were also harnessing the power of reference management tools like Zotero and Mendeley. By archiving and systematically organizing our articles in these platforms, we were setting the stage for a streamlined and in-depth analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The centrality of the data analysis phase was underscored, as it acted as the fulcrum for extracting salient insights from our comprehensive compilation of literature. Our primary strategy was the application of thematic analysis, guided by Braun et al. (2023). This necessitated a detailed perusal of each article to identify recurring themes or patterns pertinent to foreign language education in both the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions. Through this meticulous thematic analysis, we were able to discern significant topics, such as prevailing pedagogical trends, experienced challenges, students' perceptions, and the influence of policies. By systematically categorizing these emergent themes, we constructed a coherent framework that encapsulated the multifaceted landscape of foreign language education in the two regions.

Subsequent to the thematic breakdown, we embarked on a comparative analysis. This involved the creation of a matrix that juxtaposed the findings from the Kurdish region against those of the Mekong Delta. The goal was to vividly highlight the convergences and divergences in foreign language education practices and paradigms in these distinct regions. This comparative approach not only deepened our understanding of each individual region but also facilitated a broader

perspective on the myriad factors shaping education in both areas (Roig-Tierno et al., 2017).

Lastly, an iterative review mechanism was instituted. Regular deliberations within the research team ensured the alignment of our analytical efforts with the overarching study objectives and affirmed that our interpretations were both consistent and deeply grounded in the literature.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Pedagogical Trends**

Both regions have seen a gradual transition from traditional, teacher-centered methodologies to more student-centered approaches. However, while the Mekong Delta region showed a more rapid adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT) methods (Nguyen, 2020; Phuong, 2017; Phuong & Tran, 2022), the Kurdish region demonstrated a blending of traditional and modern techniques (Wali & Rassul, 2021). Drawing from the larger canvas of foreign language education globally, it is evident that the move towards more communicative and student-centered methodologies stems from a recognition of the evolving nature of language acquisition in a globalized context. The conventional, teacher-centered models, which primarily focus on linguistic accuracy, might not sufficiently equip students with the pragmatic competence required in real-world interactions. The global shift towards CLT methods emphasizes fluency, fostering learners' ability to use the language effectively in various social contexts. In the Mekong Delta, the swift adoption of CLT can be logically tied to its historical and socio-political contexts. The region, due to its past affiliations with colonial powers and subsequent international alliances, might have been more exposed to global pedagogical trends, making it more receptive to such changes. Furthermore, centralized educational reforms suggest a greater capacity to swiftly enact and disseminate new educational paradigms. The international collaborations, as mentioned, further bolster this assumption, as they could have provided the requisite resources, training, and impetus for the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies. Conversely, in the Kurdish region, the blending of traditional and modern techniques can be seen as a reflection of its socio-political dynamics. Given its tumultuous history and unique cultural landscape, there is a conscious effort to preserve native linguistic and cultural identities. This could logically explain the hesitancy in completely sidelining traditional methods, leading to a fusion of methodologies in the classroom. The blend, while preserving cultural nuances, still aligns with the global trend, albeit at a different pace and manner.

### **Technological Integration**

The Mekong Delta region exhibited higher instances of technological integration in foreign language education, benefitting from government-backed digital initiatives (Le & Pham, 2023; Le et al., 2022; Phan et al., 2022). The Kurdish region, though not as advanced, revealed growing awareness and integration of digital tools, especially in urban centers (Hamamorad, 2016; Celik et al., 2022; Bin-Hady et al., 2021). The rapid global digital transformation has touched upon various facets of education, including foreign language instruction. This transformation has not been even, with regions having distinct trajectories informed by their unique socio-political and economic circumstances. For the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions, technological integration within their education systems is emblematic of these differences. The Mekong Delta's significant strides in technological integration can be viewed as an extension of a broader trend in Southeast Asia. This region, historically known for its agility in adopting innovations, has demonstrated this trait in educational reforms as well (Thao & Mai, 2020). As highlighted, government-backed initiatives play a pivotal role, a clear indication of the region's priority to align its educational sector with global standards. Such

proactive measures not only enhance the quality of foreign language education but also help in bridging the rural-urban divide, a common challenge in many developing nations. Contrastingly, the Kurdish region has its unique challenges. Given its political landscape marked by conflicts and socio-economic constraints, priorities are often directed towards immediate needs rather than long-term educational reforms (Natali, 2010). This context offers a logical explanation for its slower digital integration pace. However, it is commendable to note the region's efforts, especially in urban centers, in recognizing the potential of digital tools in foreign language education. The cited works highlight a budding awareness, suggesting a promising future if the socio-political environment stabilizes.

### **Challenges**

The success or challenges in foreign language education in any region cannot be isolated from its contextual realities, and the cases of the Kurdish region and the Mekong Delta lucidly exemplify this. In the Kurdish region, the external factors of political unrest and limited resources directly translate to internal impediments within the educational domain. Political instability often results in interrupted schooling, inadequate resource allocation, and limited opportunities for teacher professional development (Ahmed, 2016; Shanks, 2019). Sofi-Karim (2015) further accentuated this by highlighting the under-resourced and sometimes ad-hoc nature of foreign language teaching in the region. It is thus pivotal to recognize that any strategies or interventions for improving foreign language education in the Kurdish region must be contextualized within these geopolitical constraints. As Natali (2015) underscored, a deep understanding of the region's geopolitical situation is fundamental to devising sustainable and effective educational solutions. In the Mekong Delta, the challenges seem to stem from the tension of integrating modern, globally-oriented pedagogical approaches into a system grounded in traditional values and infrastructural realities. Large class sizes and infrastructural limitations signify the strain on resources in an environment experiencing rapid growth and change (Le & Phan, 2013; Le et al., 2022). Additionally, resistance to new teaching methods is indicative of a deeper societal struggle – that of reconciling time-honored educational philosophies with emerging global paradigms (Thao & Mai, 2020). This conundrum resonates with the broader challenges outlined by Hoang et al. (2019) and is characteristic of many regions grappling with the pace of modernization.

### **Students' Perception**

Foreign language acquisition is increasingly perceived as a means to attain socioeconomic mobility, furthering the understanding of diverse cultures and expanding one's horizons. This trend can be observed universally, transcending geographical and cultural barriers, as showcased by the positive attitudes of students from both the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions. In the Kurdish region, the enthusiasm for learning foreign languages, particularly English, could be a reflection of the region's broader aspirations for global integration and normalization in the aftermath of its political challenges. This mirrors the findings of Hasan and Hasan (2019), who suggested that foreign languages are viewed as instruments of empowerment, offering avenues for international interactions, opportunities, and cultural exchanges. Contrastingly, while students in the Mekong Delta also recognize the advantages of foreign language skills, their anxiety surrounding language proficiency tests might be symptomatic of deeper societal dynamics. As Truong and Wang (2019) highlighted, this anxiety can be linked to the region's historical association with foreign languages, especially from the era of French colonization. Furthermore, given the Delta's growing economic significance and

ties with global markets, there is a heightened emphasis on language proficiency, making it not just a skill but a prerequisite for numerous opportunities. This might foster a competitive educational environment, pressurizing students to excel in proficiency tests, and thereby elevating their anxiety levels.

### **Policy Implications**

Policy frameworks play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of educational sectors, and the realm of foreign language education is no exception. The difference in policy landscapes between the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region aptly demonstrates this. In the Mekong Delta, the relatively more streamlined state intervention, as highlighted by Thao and Mai (2020) and Phuong (2017), suggests a coordinated vision. The region appears to understand the significance of foreign languages in fostering international collaborations, trade, and socio-economic development. This focus on foreign language education can also be perceived as an attempt to align the educational outcomes with the broader economic and diplomatic goals of the state. The systematic policy support provides a conducive environment for institutions, teachers, and students to adopt and adapt to newer pedagogies in language education. Conversely, the Kurdish region's fragmented policy landscape paints a contrasting picture. The sporadic nature of policy support, as indicated by Natali (2014) and Osler and Yahya (2013), is likely a manifestation of the region's geopolitical challenges. Historically, the Kurdish territories have juggled various issues ranging from internal governance debates to larger questions of statehood and sovereignty. These political intricacies invariably seep into the realm of education, making policy formulation and implementation a complex task. The fragmented policies may inadvertently create uncertainties for educational institutions, affecting their ability to introduce or sustain foreign language programs.

### **Teacher Training and Development**

The choice of teacher training methodology and collaborations is inherently a reflection of the broader objectives and constraints of a region's education system. The Kurdish region and the Mekong Delta offer contrasting approaches to teacher training in foreign language education, and the reasons for these choices are rooted in their respective historical, geopolitical, and socio-cultural landscapes. For the Kurdish region, its historical backdrop of political unrest and the quest for global recognition plays a substantial role in its leaning towards foreign-based training programs. By aligning their educational frameworks with international standards, the region likely aims not just to offer quality education, but also to send a message of global integration. By partnering with international institutions for teacher training, as underscored by Amin (2018) and Sofi-Karim (2015), the Kurdish educational authorities might be striving to elevate their educational standards to a global level. This strategic orientation can be perceived as a mechanism to counterbalance the political uncertainties they face and showcase their progressive mindset. On the other hand, the Mekong Delta's preference for local training initiatives, often in collaboration with neighboring countries, is testament to the region's evolving self-assuredness in its educational strategies. Previous studies (e.g., Lee, 2007; Guido & Orleans, 2020; Do & Pham, 2014) have clearly underscored this trend. This confidence likely springs from a combination of factors: the region's historical experiences, its aspirations within the ASEAN community, and the growing emphasis on South-South collaborations. The Mekong Delta seems to be capitalizing on the shared cultural and educational ethos of the ASEAN region, fostering a sense of regional camaraderie.

### **Curriculum Design**



Both the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region display their socio-political realities and educational aspirations through their approaches to curriculum development in foreign language education. The Mekong Delta, as illuminated by Nguyen (2013) and Nguyen and Zeichner (2021), appears to have a more top-down approach. The benefits of such a centralized curriculum are manifold: it ensures a unified direction, aligns education with national goals, and guarantees a certain degree of standardization in educational outcomes. Furthermore, centralization might facilitate easier implementation of nationwide reforms and enable more seamless coordination between different educational bodies. However, there are inherent challenges to this approach. Centralized curricula can sometimes risk becoming too generic, potentially sidelining the unique needs and cultural subtleties of particular localities within the region. This top-down model might not always capture the diverse linguistic and cultural nuances specific to certain parts of the Mekong Delta. Conversely, the Kurdish region, as described by Benavot and Resh (2003) and Wahba et al. (2013), embraces a more decentralized curriculum approach. This reflects the region's diverse socio-political fabric, characterized by various sub-regional identities and the challenges of forging a unified national narrative amidst political upheavals. The primary advantage of such an approach is its inherent adaptability. A decentralized system can swiftly respond to the unique needs of individual areas, ensuring that the curriculum resonates with the local populace. However, the drawback is the potential lack of consistency in education standards. Different areas might have varying degrees of quality and focus, leading to disparities in outcomes.

### **Assessment Techniques**

The choice of assessment techniques offers a window into the underlying pedagogical priorities and the societal aspirations of both regions. For the Mekong Delta, the emphasis on standardized testing, as observed from Quynh (2019) and Nguyen (2018), indicates several strategic motivations. First, standardized testing offers a systematic way to measure student outcomes against set benchmarks, thus providing an objective measure of efficacy. Second, by aligning with international proficiency levels, the Mekong Delta is arguably positioning its students to be competitive on a global stage, be it for higher education or employment opportunities. This could be seen as a manifestation of the region's aspiration to integrate more deeply into the global economy and academia. Yet, the inherent challenge with over-reliance on standardized testing is that it can sometimes narrow the scope of learning. When the primary objective becomes "teaching to the test," it might sideline critical aspects like critical thinking, creativity, and other holistic skills. On the other hand, the Kurdish region displays an eclectic approach to assessment. Drawing from Hassan and Fouad Ghafor (2014) and Hamamrad (2016), this might be reflective of the region's attempt to accommodate its diverse socio-cultural realities. By combining traditional methods with alternative assessment techniques, the Kurdish region is likely striving to capture a fuller spectrum of student capabilities, from rote knowledge to application, critical thinking, and creativity. The inherent strength in such a diversified approach is its ability to cater to a broader range of learners and learning styles. However, the challenge emerges when trying to compare Kurdish students' proficiency with their global counterparts. Without standardized benchmarks, the international recognition of their skills might become a contested domain.

### **Role of Culture in Education**

Delving deeper into the cultural integrations highlighted in the language instruction of both regions provides an understanding of the sociopolitical landscapes and regional goals. The

Mekong Delta's emphasis on ASEAN cultural integration, as evidenced by the works of Verbiest (2013), Hoa and Vien (2018), and Taylor (2004), appears to be rooted in multiple logical assumptions. First, it reflects the broader geopolitical strategy of the region. By integrating ASEAN cultural elements into language instruction, the Mekong Delta is not just fostering linguistic proficiency but also nurturing a generation that identifies with its Southeast Asian neighbors. This cultural alignment can significantly benefit in areas like trade, diplomacy, and regional collaboration. In addition, by placing a strong emphasis on ASEAN cultural integration, the Mekong Delta could be promoting a shared regional identity, which is crucial in an age characterized by global blocks and alliances. Yet, it is essential to also recognize the risks. Too narrow an emphasis on regional culture could limit students' exposure to global perspectives, which might be necessary in a globally interconnected era. In contrast, the Kurdish region's approach to cultural integration in language instruction, as outlined by Entassar (2009), Natali (2005), and McDowall (2021), reveals a different set of priorities and challenges. The Kurdish region has historically been at the crossroads of major powers, and its identity is deeply interwoven with both its distinct local heritage and external influences. By integrating elements of Kurdish culture into language instruction, teachers are not just teaching a foreign language but also instilling pride and awareness about Kurdish history, values, and traditions. This is crucial, especially in a region that has often faced external pressures and at times even attempts to suppress its cultural identity. Yet, the inclusion of broader Western cultural influences in the language curriculum indicates an aspiration to be part of the global discourse, recognizing the soft power that Western cultural elements often wield. This duality – of retaining local identity while being open to global influences – speaks to the resilience and adaptability of the Kurdish region. However, the challenge remains: ensuring that one does not overshadow the other, and students get a balanced worldview.

### **Private versus Public Education**

The privatization of education in the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region points to broader socio-economic and political shifts, with both manifesting distinct characteristics based on their specific contexts. In the Mekong Delta, the emergence of private language centers and schools is intricately tied to the region's socio-economic metamorphosis. With rapid urbanization and growth, there is a marked rise in the urban middle class, which is characterized by disposable income and a strong inclination to invest in education as outlined by Le (2011). This urbanization and economic evolution not only imbue the population with resources but also with the ambition to secure their children's future, seeing education as a passport to continued or heightened socio-economic prosperity. Additionally, as Vu and Peters (2021) and Le and Chen (2018) highlighted, these private institutions often position themselves as premium education providers. With better facilities and specialized teachers, they promise parents a competitive edge for their children in a globalized world where English proficiency has become invaluable. Contrastingly, the Kurdish region's educational landscape is profoundly influenced by its unique socio-political history. This region, with its tumultuous past characterized by significant political challenges, might not provide the ideal bedrock for large-scale private educational ventures, a perspective echoed by Parker (2016). Instead of a proliferation of private schools, there is a discernible trend toward private tutoring. Scholars like Akkari (2004) and Hayati and Mashhadi (2010) suggested this might be a reactive measure by parents to compensate for perceived shortcomings within the public education sector. In a region where political instability might affect educational quality and consistency, parents are driven to seek supplementary education for their children. Furthermore, there is the

undeniable allure of tailored instruction. Private tutoring offers a more personalized, focused approach, catering to individual student needs and addressing specific gaps in their learning journey.

### **Extracurricular Language Activities**

In both the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region, extracurricular activities emerge as potent tools for reinforcing language learning beyond traditional classroom settings. The Mekong Delta has witnessed a significant surge in such endeavors, as evidenced by the proliferation of language clubs, exchange programs, and cultural fests. Researchers Le et al. (2023), Nhan (2013), and Mai and Thao (2023) underscored this trend, suggesting a broader regional agenda that champions holistic language immersion. This approach transcends the mere mechanics of language, allowing students to immerse themselves in cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and the rhythm of colloquial speech – aspects often elusive in structured classroom environments. Contrastingly, the Kurdish region, while also recognizing the value of extracurricular immersion, manifests it differently. While the opportunities for such engagements are limited, they are gradually growing, predominantly focusing on local cultural events. Al Hosni (2014), Sengupta (2017), and Schleppegrell (2013) highlighted this trajectory, pointing towards both its challenges and potentials. Given the political unrest and economic challenges endemic to the region, it is conceivable that large-scale extracurricular ventures are challenging to execute. However, the growing emphasis on local cultural events as platforms for language immersion underscores a resilient and innovative spirit. For the Kurdish region, language learning and cultural preservation are inextricably intertwined. Through such events, students not only hone their linguistic skills but also develop a deep-rooted appreciation for their heritage, forging an identity that harmoniously melds the past with the present.

### **Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement in a child's education, especially in the realm of foreign language acquisition, often acts as a barometer for broader socio-economic and cultural tendencies within a region. This is evident when comparing the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region. In the Mekong Delta, parents display a marked commitment to their children's foreign language education. As highlighted by previous studies (e.g., Pham, 2021; Pham, 2016; Le, 2023), it is not uncommon for families in this region to invest in additional resources and supplementary courses. This demonstrates not just the value they place on language proficiency as a crucial skill but also their financial capability and access to relevant educational resources. Conversely, the Kurdish region presents a more nuanced picture. Urban families are considerably more active in their children's language learning journey, reminiscent of the enthusiasm seen in the Mekong Delta. However, this engagement wanes in rural areas. Saeed (2021) and Zaidi et al. (2021) provided insights into this discrepancy, hinting at the interplay of economic disparities, access to resources, and possibly cultural perceptions about the utility of foreign language education.

### **Use of Native Language in Instruction**

The incorporation of native languages within the foreign language classroom is a topic that generates varied opinions and methodologies across different regions and cultural backgrounds. When examining the pedagogical strategies employed in the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region, striking differences emerge. In the Mekong Delta, a distinct preference for full immersion in the foreign language is evident, especially in advanced courses. Research by

Le (2012), Tri and Moskovsky (2019), and Giang (2022) affirmed this inclination, indicating a pedagogical belief that immersion techniques expedite language acquisition and fluency. This approach aligns with a broader global trend, where immersion is often championed for its purported benefits in enhancing linguistic proficiency. Contrastingly, the Kurdish region showcases a different philosophy. Even at advanced levels of foreign language instruction, there remains a significant presence of the native Kurdish language. Amin (2009), Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes (2008), and Shendy (2022) provided insights into this approach, which appears rooted not just in pedagogical beliefs but also in socio-cultural considerations. Given the historical and political context of the Kurdish region, language becomes more than just a means of communication. It is an emblem of identity, culture, and resistance. By integrating Kurdish consistently into foreign language instruction, there seems to be a concerted effort to ensure that the process of acquiring a new language does not overshadow or diminish the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Kurdish people.

### **Future Aspirations and Motivations**

Motivations for learning a foreign language often transcend mere linguistic interest, being deeply intertwined with socio-cultural, economic, and political aspirations. A study of the driving forces behind students' commitment to language acquisition in the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region reveals a tapestry of varied ambitions, informed by the distinctive histories and socio-cultural narratives of each region. In the Mekong Delta, motivations are seemingly pragmatic. According to Anh (2012), Nguyen (2017), and Wright (2020), students are propelled by a trifecta of goals: academic achievements, securing positions in international firms, and leveraging opportunities for regional mobility. This aligns with the broader developmental trajectory of the Mekong Delta, where rapid urbanization and globalization have augmented the value of foreign language proficiency. For these students, mastering a foreign language becomes an essential tool, unlocking doors to academic excellence and lucrative careers in an increasingly interconnected ASEAN region. The Kurdish students, on the other hand, have motivations that weave a more intricate narrative. While job prospects remain a significant driver, akin to their Mekong Delta counterparts, there is a deeper cultural and emotional dimension to their motivations. Studies by Donitsa-Schmidt et al. (2004), Kakabra (2015), and Ahmed et al. (2021) highlighted a palpable desire among Kurdish students to forge connections with the global Kurdish diaspora. This aspiration goes beyond mere communication; it is a yearning to be part of a broader Kurdish collective, to share stories, experiences, and to resonate with shared cultural and historical threads. Additionally, there is an evident pride and a sense of duty to be ambassadors of Kurdish culture on the global stage.

### **Teacher Autonomy and Satisfaction**

In any educational context, the role and autonomy of teachers are integral in shaping the learning experience. Delving into the dynamics of teacher autonomy in the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish region provides a lens through which one can better understand the pedagogical environment of each region and its potential implications. In the Mekong Delta, the academic literature paints a picture of greater freedom for teachers. As evidenced by studies from Tran and Moskovsky (2022), Phan (2012), and Nguyen and Walkinshaw (2018), there is an observable trend where teachers are given significant leeway to adapt the curriculum and employ classroom strategies tailored to their students' needs. This kind of autonomy can be a double-edged sword; on one hand, it can empower teachers to be innovative, harnessing localized strategies that resonate with the cultural and linguistic nuances of their students. Such approaches can often foster a more engaging and effective learning environment, wherein

students feel their learning experiences are grounded in their realities. On the other hand, in the Kurdish region, the scenario appears to be more complex. As noted by Sofi-Karim (2015) and Hamad (2018), while some teachers feel empowered and autonomous, others perceive their roles as being more constrained, having to operate within the boundaries of centralized directives. This mixed bag of experiences can lead to varied outcomes. For teachers who feel constrained, there might be a perception that their professional expertise and understanding of local needs are being overlooked in favor of a top-down approach. Such feelings could potentially stifle innovation and result in a teaching style that is more by-the-book and less adaptive to students' unique needs. However, it is worth noting that centralized directives can also provide a consistent framework, ensuring that all students, regardless of their specific location within the Kurdish region, receive a standardized quality of education. It is a balance that policymakers continually grapple with – the tension between standardization and localization.

## **Conclusion**

The comprehensive literature analysis of foreign language education in the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions unveiled multifaceted dimensions, weaving a tapestry of intricate patterns, shared challenges, and distinctive characteristics. Both regions demonstrated a perceptible shift from traditional, teacher-centric pedagogies towards more student-centered methodologies. The Mekong Delta's swift embrace of the CLT methods is a testament to its inclination towards modern pedagogical trends. In contrast, the Kurdish region's fusion of the old and new embodies its unique socio-cultural milieu. Technological strides were more pronounced in the Mekong Delta, propelled by government initiatives. However, the Kurdish region's budding digital awareness, especially in urban locales, heralds a promising future for technological integration. Challenges abounded in both landscapes. The Mekong Delta grappled with logistical issues and resistance to change, whereas the Kurdish region's hurdles were more rooted in political instability, resource constraints, and the need for comprehensive teacher training. Students across both terrains acknowledged the significance of foreign languages as a conduit for improved career prospects and cultural insights. Yet, the Mekong Delta's students bore the weight of anxiety tied to language proficiency evaluations.

Policies in the Mekong Delta were characterized by robust state intervention, mirroring national ambitions. The Kurdish region's fragmented policy landscape, conversely, depicted its geopolitical intricacies. The nuances in teacher training between the regions are worth noting. While the Kurdish region leaned on international collaborations, the Mekong Delta's strategy was more regional, forging ties with neighboring Southeast Asian countries. Curriculum designs in the Mekong Delta adhered to centralized tenets, reflecting national priorities. The Kurdish region displayed more flexibility, tailoring curricula to regional needs. Assessments in the Mekong Delta leaned heavily on standardized tests, targeting international benchmarks. The Kurdish area presented a richer palette of assessment tools, encompassing traditional and innovative methods. Culture, a vital component of language instruction, was emphasized in both contexts. However, the Mekong Delta's affinity towards ASEAN integration contrasted the Kurdish region's balancing act between local heritage and global orientations.

The rise of private education institutions in the Mekong Delta paralleled the Kurdish region's surge in private tutoring, reflecting differing socio-economic dynamics. Extracurricular activities in the Mekong Delta flourished, while the Kurdish region showcased a budding

interest in cultural events. Parental engagement patterns highlighted the Mekong Delta's proactive involvement. In the Kurdish landscape, urban parents led the charge, pointing to socio-economic gradients. Instructional methodologies drew on native languages differently. While the Mekong Delta veered towards immersion, the Kurdish region interwove Kurdish consistently. Students' aspirations underscored both regions' alignment with global trends. Yet, Kurdish students harbored a fervent wish to resonate with the global Kurdish community. Lastly, teacher autonomy narratives in the Mekong Delta pointed to empowerment, while Kurdish experiences were mixed.

In wrapping up, this analysis accentuated the dynamism of foreign language education, shaped by historical, socio-economic, and cultural undercurrents. While the Mekong Delta and the Kurdish regions have their unique trajectories, their shared aspirations underscore the universal quest for global integration and cultural preservation.

## **Implications**

The intricate analysis of foreign language education in both the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions illuminates a wealth of insights that have profound implications for educators, policymakers, researchers, and curriculum developers across diverse geographical and cultural settings. The evident shift from traditional, teacher-centered pedagogies towards more dynamic, student-centric methodologies in both regions underscores a global trend in education. However, the pace and nature of this transition vary, necessitating region-specific training programs. This evolution marks an urgent call for consistent, ongoing professional development for teachers. While training should address global pedagogical shifts, it must also ensure that instructional methods are culturally resonant and contextually relevant.

The burgeoning role of technology in the modern classroom is unmistakable. For regions like the Kurdish area, the implication is twofold: raising awareness of the potential of digital tools and ensuring their active integration. Conversely, the Mekong Delta, already at the forefront of technological adoption, might explore pioneering EdTech solutions, ensuring they remain at the cutting edge of digital education. Furthermore, as the Mekong Delta progresses in infrastructural advancements, the Kurdish region, especially its rural sectors, needs to prioritize investments in educational facilities and resources.

Policy direction significantly influences educational trajectories. While the Mekong Delta benefits from structured policies, the Kurdish region faces the challenge of policy fragmentation. Policymakers in the Kurdish area might consider fostering a more unified approach, drawing inspiration from the Mekong Delta while ensuring flexibility for regional nuances. Additionally, the pronounced variability in the Kurdish region's curriculum design suggests room for more standardized guidelines, but these must allow space for regional specificities. On the assessment front, the diversity of techniques in the Kurdish region presents an opportunity. Marrying traditional with alternative assessments can foster comprehensive skill evaluation while tempering the stress commonly tied to standardized exams.

The intertwining of culture and language instruction is a salient theme across both regions. For curriculum developers, the challenge and opportunity lie in seamlessly melding local cultural narratives with global contexts, rendering language learning both engaging and relevant. The rise of private educational entities across both landscapes indicates a burgeoning market demand for specialized language instruction. This trend suggests potential avenues for public-private partnerships, pooling resources, and expertise. Further, the value of extracurricular

linguistic experiences, more pronounced in the Mekong Delta, signifies an avenue the Kurdish region might further explore. With parental involvement varying across regions and urban-rural divides, targeted strategies, including community outreach and parental workshops, could foster more active family engagement in students' language learning journeys. Finally, the Mekong Delta's trend towards greater teacher autonomy in curriculum adaptations suggests a pathway for the Kurdish region. By revisiting potentially restrictive policies and fostering a climate of trust and empowerment, regions can ensure that educators feel both supported and autonomous.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies**

This study primarily revolved around peer-reviewed journal articles sourced from specific databases, which might have inadvertently omitted insights from broader scholarly contributions such as books or conference papers. The chosen time frame of the last two decades might have left out foundational or historical perspectives vital for understanding certain trends. Additionally, the immense internal diversities of the Kurdish and Mekong Delta regions could have nuances that this study might not have captured in full. The potential English language and database bias, inherent challenges in balancing quantitative and qualitative data, and the subjective nature of literature analysis could further limit the study's comprehensiveness.

Future research endeavors could benefit from diversifying their sources, perhaps by considering books, theses, and government reports to achieve a holistic view. A longitudinal approach could delve deeper into the evolutionary trends of foreign language education in these regions. Researchers might also consider more granular, micro-level studies focusing on specific communities, or expanding the comparative approach to other global regions. To mitigate potential biases and achieve a grounded perspective, it would be beneficial to incorporate articles and studies in native languages. Supplementary empirical field research, pedagogical tool assessments, policy-focused analyses, and teacher-centric studies could provide a multi-dimensional perspective, driving more effective interventions and policy decisions in the realm of foreign language education.

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